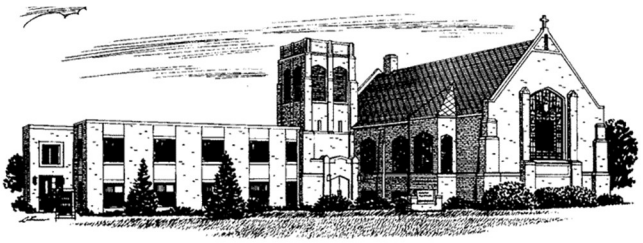
SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085



Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

The Rev. Joan Oleson, Pastor
Home: 269-983-2475
Email: oleson@saronlutheran.org

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll1mc@gmail.com

Irma Gorman, Organist

Amanda Bradley, Admin Assistant
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Sara Porter, Childcare Specialist
Email: portersara20@gmail.com

Typical Sunday at Saron:

Fall, Winter and Spring (began Sept 10):
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am Learning Hour for Ages 3-Adult
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer (begins May 26, 2024):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Dr. Craig Satterlee, Bishop of the
North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of Western MI

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia
Saron's Mission: *Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!*

PASTOR JOAN'S ARTICLE FOR JANUARY 2024

What a joy it was to worship yesterday with the youth leading our time together. From the liturgical portions to special music (piano and chimes) to the message they brought in word and action. I am grateful. I am grateful for THEIR joy and willingness. Very often we hear that our youth are the church of the future. It is true, yes. Yet they are also the church now. And, I am grateful that Saron is a place that helps them in their faith formation – not only on Sundays such as this, but throughout the year.

The refrain of yesterday's message was "any room here?" The answer, finally, was "there's room…come on in!" As we make room in our hearts daily for Jesus' coming, I remember the words offered by yesterday's narrator, "It's amazing that the Son of God was born not in a palace or in a mansion, but in a simple stable…The surroundings can be simple because it's the person that matters and God loves us all! …This is the day that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born. This is his story. It is truly a miracle."

Merry Christmas, dear ones! May Jesus be born in our hearts every day.

- Pastor Joan

Mark your calendar for:

January 28, 2024

We will join together to hear council and committee reports, approve the 2024 spending plan, elect new council members, and more! We will meet after the 11am service for a potluck, with the Annual Meeting to follow at 1pm. The Zoom link will remain the same as the worship service. All members should plan to attend. Guests are welcome.

General Information

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor Joan
Monday-Thursday Mornings
Amanda Bradley (Admin Assistant):
Mondays & Thursdays 9am-noon
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Tuesday Mornings

When Pastor is out of town, emergency pastoral care information can be obtained by calling the church office (269/983-1273) or contacting the council president.

Note: Emails for Pastor should be addressed to oleson@saronlutheran.org to ensure privacy. Emails to Amanda and the church office should be sent to info@saronlutheran.org.

Caring and Sharing

IN OUR PRAYERS

Tom Taylor is at Caretel in St. Joseph;
John Olson is at the Willows in St. Joseph.

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

1/2 Sophie de la Foret
1/3 Kealana Gulley
1/14 T.J. Koehler
1/15 Colin Ashley
1/15 Pat Breyen
1/15 Meredith Hammer
1/15 Walter Schmuhl
1/16 Jonah Rood
1/18 Hayley Frey
1/19 Claire Carter
1/19 Willow Davis
1/19 Katherine Nadeau
1/23 Don Hafer
1/24 James Hicks
1/25 Karen Johnson
1/27 Kathi Anserello
1/28 Rev Wayne Shearier
1/28 John Taylor
1/29 Ken Boyd
1/31 Carly Knauf

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

1/1 Linda & Charles Pater
1/2 James & Jennifer Nicholas
1/19 Steven & Denise Cook

"God's Blessings for a very happy day and year round!"

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

CONGRATULATIONS

On December 3, **Elijah Nicholas** took his first turn serving as an acolyte. Thank you for your willingness to serve, Elijah!

We were blessed to welcome **Janet & Ken Boyd** as new members of Saron on December 10, 2023. Ken has also accepted the position of Saron Bookkeeper, replacing Megan Savage, who has moved for a new opportunity. While joining the congregation and the staff are not at all related events, they are both exciting!

As we get ever closer to wrapping up this incredible, multi-year endeavor, we are focusing on items remaining on our priority list such as additional indoor and outdoor improvements, which could include potential signage, lighting, and painting projects. Even when it seems like nothing is happening, trust we are conscious of the funds that are left and discussions are taking place regarding how best to use them.

As always, thank you for being with us on this journey and know that we will keep you informed until all projects are complete and all the money has been responsibly spent.

Worship

SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we now have Sensory Bags available for use during worship or at other times when helpful. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your prayer petitions (concerns or thanksgivings) via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made confidentially online via a link in our Thursday mailings. You may include as much detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are also invited to be part of the Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. You don't even have to pray aloud, if you would prefer to pray quietly. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes. If you want to know more about this ministry, please contact Pastor Joan.

ZOOM COFFEE HOUR

We will continue the Wednesday Zoom Coffee Hour at 11am as long as there is interest. All are welcome!

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. Flowers are $35 per vase. Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then **simply return the vase to Saron.**

FACEBOOK

We often share pictures of Saron's ministry on our Facebook page. We do not put names with the pictures. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Pastor.

Nursery service is available during worship. In order to utilize the space most effectively, this option is primarily directed towards our youngest members and guests. For preschoolers that need more physical and/or emotional space, activities are available in the narthex, including clipboards with coloring pages and children's bulletins. **It's vital to embrace family units in all stages and as such, we gladly welcome wiggles and giggles in worship!**

The goal of the nursery is to provide a safe environment to facilitate a meaningful worship experience for families. We recognize that may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions.

We are always looking for additional helpers to share the load. Contact Marilyn Lucy (269/759-3464) with questions or interest.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

January 7: Baptism of Our Lord
Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11

January 14: Second Sunday After Epiphany
1 Samuel 3:1-10
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

January 21: Third Sunday after Epiphany
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 62:5-12
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

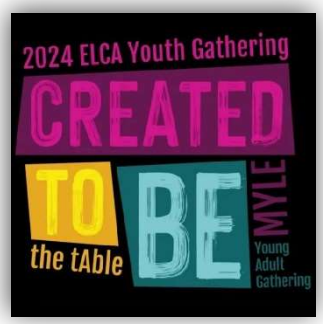
January 28: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 1:21-28

YOUTH GROUP

Our youth group (middle school and high school kids) met during the Learning Hour on Sunday, December 17 for a Christmas party before the Youth Christmas Service. There were donuts and a scavenger hunt that may or may not have been a wild goose chase. This group typically meets once per month after the late service for food, fun and fellowship. Watch your email for more information on the next gathering. Friends are always welcome!

Contact Scott at scottgaspari@outlook.com with any questions or to be added to the email list.

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING



We are excited to officially announce four of our teen members are registered to attend the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans this coming summer! They, along with three adult member chaperones, will be spending a week with tens of thousands of members of other ELCA congregations in a city known for always being its true, authentic self. The theme, “Created to Be,” highlights the arts, music and soul of this beautiful, vibrant and resilient city. They will dive deeper into justice, mental health and anti-racism conversations throughout the Gathering while also doing service projects and experiencing the culture of New Orleans. They hope to learn more about themselves, make some new friends and be a sanctuary for one another.

In the coming months, we will share more about this exciting once in a lifetime opportunity ahead of them and will offer ways for our congregation to support these teens through prayers and fundraising events. The chaperones will also need lots of prayers! Stay tuned!

Learning

Saron is a congregation seeking to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered and sent by the Word.

We have many educational options to fit your needs and schedule. Always feel welcome to join us, at any time and for as many sessions as works for you.

Bible Study

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

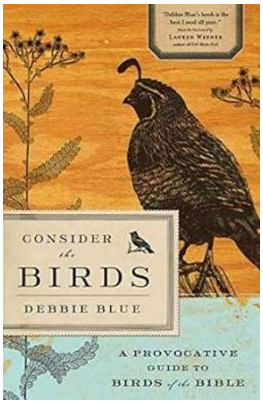
Our program year is underway. We have opportunities for many ages and stages!

The Sunday Learning Hour (9:40am-10:30am) offers the following options:

- Preschool - Grade 5: Sunday School
- Grades 6-8: Confirmation Classes
- High School - Adult: Adult Forum

THURSDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

On January 4, we will begin a new five-week study using the book "Consider the Birds" by Debbie Blue.



From Amazon - *Highlighting 10 birds throughout Scripture, author Debbie Blue explores their significance in both familiar and unfamiliar biblical stories and illustrates how and why they have represented humanity across culture, Christian tradition, art, and contemporary psyche. With these (usually) minor characters at the forefront of human imaginations, poignant life lessons illuminate such qualities as desire and gratitude, power and vulnerability, insignificance and importance—and provide us with profound lessons about humanity, faith, and God's mysterious grace.*

You are invited to join the group from 9:30am-11am on Thursday mornings where there is lots of good conversation. If you'd like to order a book, at a cost of approximately $16, please let Pastor know.

TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

We resume on **January 2** and will spend the six weeks before breaking for Lent on week-to-week studies with the primary focus being the lessons and Gospel reading for the following Sunday. We will try to mix in a relevant Father Casey Cole video or other current topic here and there. Hope you can join us!

We meet **Tuesday evenings at 6pm** in the upstairs lounge for one hour then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. **All are welcome!**

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Bob Kynast (269-921-2786, bobkynast@gmail.com)
Don Hafer (269-985-3637, hafer.don@gmail.com)

FORUM & fellowship

Forum & Fellowship is a twice monthly discussion group which meets at 7pm at Saron in the upstairs lounge. Our next topic will convene on January 3 and 17 and will end on February 7. Everyone is welcome.

What is the Future of the Church in America? This question is not a new one. Over my 45 years teaching in the Lutheran system, it seemed to always be a shadow in the background of conversations about school and church growth, or death in inner cities and rural communities. Recently though, the topic seems to be coming up more and more in public conversation. The Atlantic magazine devoted a number of articles to it this past year. Even our local Herald-Palladium devoted space in the October 7-8 edition for a local story on this.

So what is different today? Is there really a decline? Is it getting worse? How might it impact our larger communities? What is causing it, and what can be done about it? What will the church of the future look like if it is to meet the challenges of today's decline?

January 3: We will dig into the background a bit and look at data which indicates trends of where we are today.

January 17: We will discuss the challenges of what it may take to reach those who have intentionally left the church.

February 7: We will host a panel of area pastors to discuss this from a local perspective.

We meet at 7pm on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions. All are welcome!

BOOK CLUB

Our next meeting will be on **February 4 at 6:30pm in the lounge**. The book up for discussion is "Second Glance" by Jodi Picoult. An astonishing story of love, fate, a crime of passion, the Abenaki Indian Tribe and Vermont's eugenics projects of the 1920's and 1930's, plus so much more. This book is guaranteed to generate a good discussion to kick off 2024. Please join us for a season of good reading.

You are welcome to come to any session that catches your interest. Please contact Kathy Cowall 269/428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com if you want to receive email updates, reminders and Zoom information.

Book lovers can teleport to different worlds; they just need a good book, a soft blanket, and a comfy chair.
- Jamie E. Davis

Women of the ELCA

SARON CHURCH WOMEN

Saron Church Women thanks everyone who participated in the bake sale on December 10, 2023. Proceeds from that day came to $457. Continued donations on December 17 totaled an additional $59. The grand total of **$516** will be equally divided among Samaritas (LSSM), Benton Harbor Readiness Center, and Lori's Place. Thanks, again, for all of your generous support.

DEBORAH CIRCLE

Deborah Circle Christmas dinner will be held at the home of Linda Pater on **January 10, 2024 at 6pm**. A carpool will leave the church at **5:30pm** for those who wish to join it. Everyone should bring a dish to share (not dessert) and also a monetary gift for the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen.

If you have any questions,
contact Melanie at 269/449-8399.

INSTALLATION

On Sunday, January 14, 2024, the following Saron Church Women Officers and Leaders will be installed.

President: Melanie McCammon
Vice President: Claudia Staude
Treasurer: Denise Cook
Mission Action Chair: Colleen Lundgren
Church Women United Representative: Irma Gorman
Deborah Circle Chair: Melanie McCammon

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship in the narthex? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™ HEART-TO-HEART™

Thank you to all who volunteered to prepare a dinner, bake cookies and share a meal with one another at the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen this past year. With your support, including financial donations, Saron served over 1,000 meals in 2023! We are always welcoming new volunteers to work on the 4th Thursday of each month from 10:30am - 1pm at the Soup Kitchen and also provide homebaked cookies.

If you are able to help with the preparation and serving, or by providing cookies, please use the link in the weekly email or contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!

NOISY OFFERING

We receive a noisy offering (or those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month. These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Thank you for your continued support!

ELCA GOOD GIFTS

As of printing, we've already collected sponsors for 7 Goats, 17 Piglets, 26 Honeybees, and 6 Chicks for a total of $1440! That is a great response to help fill a great need. There is still time to participate, as we are collecting sponsors through **January 7**. Also, a reminder to the kids who received banks during the children's sermon last month, any funds you've collected should be brought in on January 7 to be matched by the Don & Carol Hafer. You can keep the bank. Thank you for you continued support of this vital and impactful outreach program!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions or need clarification on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:

Connor Ashley: cashley1837@outlook.com
Laurel Gacek: 269/470-6062 or mlmg2445@sbcglobal.net
Laura Hicks: 517/930-0579 or lhicks42@gmail.com
Darlene Kiessel: 269/313-4062 or kiessel@me.com
Pr Joan Oleson: 269/983-1273 or oleson@saronlutheran.org
Lindsay Gaspari: 847/373-8826 or lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

The first step in getting involved, is getting informed. Register to receive their communications at https://swmichinterfaith.org/contact1

Support

The Support Committee typically meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

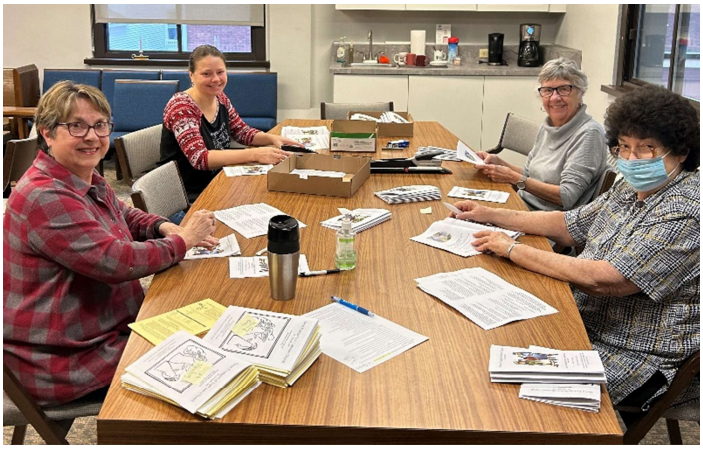
STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with TD Ameritrade, a brokerage firm, to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Joe Ulrey at josephulrey@yahoo.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS (Previously Golden Hammers)

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands.



Having five services in just over 24 hours requires a lot of bulletins! Thank you, Helping Hands, for always being there to prep the church and keep things moving smoothly!

It may seem like one day the nativity scene just appears as though by miracle but it is actually yet another volunteer driven activity.

Thank you to all those that helped decorate the church this Christmas. It takes many hands and when we ask, you provide. ❤

BLESSED

Other Bits of News

BURIAL PLOTS AVAILABLE

Are you, or someone you love, in need of a burial plot? Saron has been gifted with two adult plots, which can be divided, at **North Shore Memory Garden in Coloma**, as well as a niche for two end-to-end caskets in the Mausoleum. We are offering these at a reduced current value with proceeds going to the Endowment Fund. If interested, or you have questions, contact **Liz Kunkel (269/429-1132) or Pastor.**

In 2025, Saron will celebrate our 150th anniversary! This will be a big deal and a huge undertaking, with events throughout that whole year. The committee has been formed to begin preliminary planning. Watch for details to emerge and if you are interested in helping, don't worry, there will be plenty of opportunities to join subcommittees this year.

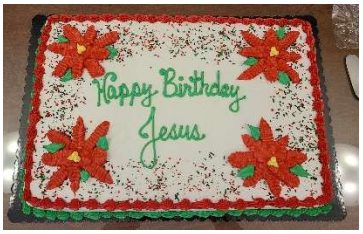
Corner of Cuteness

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email:info@saronlutheran.org

A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

JANUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 11am Prayer Group	**2** 6pm Bible Study	**3** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee 7pm Forum & Fellowship	**4** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**5**	**6**
7 **Noisy Offering** 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Choir & Zoom Option	**8** 11am Prayer Group	**9** 6pm Bible Study 8pm Support Meeting	**10** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee	**11** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**12**	**13**
14 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Choir & Zoom Option	**15** 11am Prayer Group 7pm Church Council	**16** 6pm Bible Study	**17** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee 7pm Forum & Fellowship	**18** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **NEWSLETTER ARTICLES DUE**	**19**	**20**
21 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Choir & Zoom Option	**22** 11am Prayer Group	**23** 6pm Bible Study	**24** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee	**25** 9:30am Bible Study 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **SARON'S SOUP KITCHEN DAY**	**26**	**27**
28 8:30am Worship 9:40am Learning Hour 11am Worship with Choir & Zoom Option **12pm Potluck with Annual Meeting follow at 1pm**	**29** 11am Prayer Group	**30** 6pm Bible Study	**31** 9am Helping Hands 11am Zoom Coffee			